

360 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

As your Royal Highness ought to have a close connection with the King of England, it seems right that you should know him thoroughly. For this reason I am going to make his portrait as much like him as possible. He is forty two years old, of medium height, very thin, always troubled by a violent inflammation of the lungs, and constitutionally so feeble that his life seems to hang by a thread, but as he refrains from every kind of excess and avoids everything at variance with his temperament, he looks after the little health he has so well that he resists the fatigues of war and the chase, which are his two ruling passions. He is naturally melancholy, loving silence and retirement. His genius is vast and prompts him to large designs. His firmness and patience are proof against the greatest obstacles which never deter him, but his procrastination and irresolution stop him on the smoothest roads.¹ This fault, which is the only one he can be reproached with, is capable of ruining his affairs, for although he works unceasingly, negotiating and writing day and night, he never finishes anything in time, and this makes his ministers grumble and complain that they have to speak to him a hundred times about the same thing without receiving a definite reply. When I try to plumb the causes of this irresolution I find the three principal to be : the first his birth in a country where men are naturally sluggish in making up their minds ; the second the feeling that he has gained much in the past by not hurrying, and the third an eagerness to do everything

himself, because he distrusts the fidelity or the capacity of his ministers. Hence spring all kinds of confusion. Men are not recruited, the troops destined for the Low Countries are not transported, the fleet is not ready, and many necessities are lacking for the descent (on France) which is talked about. To this procrastination is attributed the squandering of his financial resources. ... At any rate King William, all things considered, does not fall short of a great prince, and his authority is so well established that

¹ Cf Burnet, ii. 89, and above, p. 334, for William's slowness in trans-acting business.